

# Sermon Series Guide

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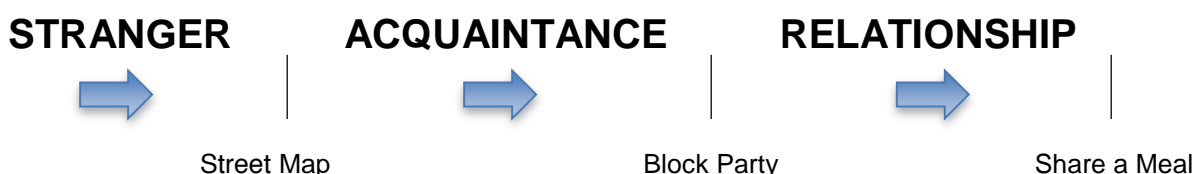
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## OVERVIEW

**Our Goal:** To inspire and equip believers to become neighborhood catalysts that move themselves and others from Stranger to Acquaintance and from Acquaintance to Relationship.

**Our Strategy:** We have identified three “neighborhood practices” that will help people to take practical steps towards becoming great neighbors. Our sermon series will “assign” the first two practices as action steps and encourage the third practice.



The **Block Map** assignment encourages people to learn and retain the names of the people who live in the 8 houses that are closest to them.

The **Block Party** assignment creates an environment where relationships can be birthed and gives people an opportunity to learn a more about their neighbors. Somewhere in each of the 3 messages, encourage your people to begin to pray for their neighbors and to pray about taking the next step towards relationships with those who live near them, perhaps through a **Shared Meal**.

**Series Overview:** Most people struggle to build relationships with their neighbors because:

1. Lack of understanding the Value
2. Lack of Time
3. Lack of Trust

The themes for the three sermons in this series are designed to address each of these issues. Participating churches are free to modify the content that follows to fit the context of their congregations. **We are simply asking everyone to communicate the same BIG IDEA each week and to encourage/challenge their people to do the weekly ACTION STEP.**

[WWW.NEXTDOOR.COM](http://WWW.NEXTDOOR.COM) is a great resource where people can register their homes and connect with others who live around them.

## Week 1: Taking the Great Commandment Literally



**Big Idea:** The power and genius of The Great Commandment is that it's so simple and yet extremely powerful when acted on. The smartest thing that we can do collectively to impact our city is to actually live out Jesus' command to love our neighbors.



**Action Step:** In your sermon, have everyone do the Block Map exercise on a bulletin insert (see the application section below and the week one video for ideas on how best to do this). Ask your people to make a commitment to learn, retain, and use the names of their 8 closest neighbors. Give everyone that commits to taking the next step a Block Map Fridge Magnet as they walk out of the service. The magnets are very effective tools that help people follow through on this commitment.

### Thoughts to Build on:

- Many of us have become inoculated to The Great Commandment
- When we try to love everyone, we often end up loving no one. If we are not intentional, we end up having metaphorical love for our metaphorical neighbors, and the end result is that we actually do very little.
- Share your personal experience with neighboring, especially where you have come up short.
- We can only do a few things really well – let's make sure that one of them is the thing that Jesus said matters most.
- A good neighbor always trumps a good program.

### Texts:

**Acts 17:26-27:** "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."

- We don't live where we live by accident, and it's not because we like the floor plan or the school system or because it's all we can afford. If this text is true, then we live where we live because God has placed us in our specific neighborhoods for a reason. We need to rediscover a "theology of place" and begin to really **Love Where We Live!**

### **Luke 10:25-37: The Great Commandment and The Good Samaritan.**

- Verse 29: "But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" The expert in the law tries to define his neighbor as someone that he can choose to care for. How many of us have done something similar and thus excused ourselves from the call to know and love our literal neighbors?
- The Samaritan meets the physical, material, financial and emotional needs of the man in his path. Our neighbors are in our path on a daily basis.
- When teaching the Good Samaritan, the fact that the actual definition of neighbor is much bigger than just our literal neighbors is an important issue to address. In raising the value of literal neighboring, we don't want to dismiss the other forms of neighboring. Saying something along these lines might be helpful:

*I know that many of you might be thinking to yourself, "According to this story, my co-workers, the parents on my kids team, the person I served on a short-term missions trip are all my neighbors." That is actually 100% true. However, that doesn't somehow lessen the fact that our literal neighbors are still our neighbors. Great things happen when we begin building relationships with those who live closest to us and then work out from there. If you have some blanks on that block map, then maybe we should get back to the basics before focusing on the graduate level call to neighboring.*



### **Application:** The Block Map Exercise

**Next Step Assignment:** Have your people reflect on those who live in the 8 residences that are closest to them, asking them list out the names of the people in each of those 8 households. Ask for a show of hands of who can list out all of them. Then ask for a show of hands of who can fill out 5 or more of the boxes.

Well under 50% of the people in the room will know majority of their neighbor's names (have 5 or more of the boxes filled in). As pastors, one of the most powerful things that we can do is to share how much of this chart you could fill in when you first did this exercise and how you have taken the next step.

- The point of the exercise is to expose the fact that many of us don't even know our neighbors' names. It's hard to love someone if you don't know their name.
- Tell your people that YOU are going to do this with them and that you are going to give everyone who is committed to learn neighbors' names a fridge magnet that has the block map image on it.

**Prayer of the week:** God give me a desire to be in relationship with my literal neighbors.

**Week 1 Sermon Video:** <https://vimeo.com/101146447>. Our goal is to speak with a united voice during this series. Please feel free to use any of the material on these videos as you see fit as the speaker has encouraged us to do so.

## Week 2: The Time Barrier



**Big Idea:** In order to take The Great Commandment seriously, we must create space in our lives to build relationships with those who live near us.



**Action Step:** Ask everyone to make a commitment to spend at least an hour this week in their front yard or in the common area of their apartment/condo. Also, follow up on the Block Map exercise from last week, asking your people if they were successful in learning the names of some of their neighbors since last Sunday. Put the block map cards in your bulletins again and have the magnets available in the lobby for people who were absent the previous Sunday.

### Thoughts to Build on:

- The biggest obstacle to taking the Great Commandment seriously is TIME.
- When we say, “I don’t have time to get to know my neighbor,” what we are really saying is “I don’t consider getting to know my neighbor as important as everything else that I do.”
- We live in tension between the urgent and the important. When our priorities are determined by the urgent, our lives won’t match up with our intentions and values.
- Jesus got a lot done, but his life was not feverish. He had time for people and for conversations.
- Do we live at a pace that allows us to be available to those who live around us? Jesus had time for interruptions ... do we? What would it take to change the pace of our lives in order to be more available to those who live around us?
- The Art of Elimination Illustration: Michelangelo and the “David” statue (*see week 2 sermon video*)



- In “The Life You Have Always Wanted,” John Ortberg states, “Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day.” He coins the phrase “Hurry Sickness” and goes on to say that the reason hurrying is so dangerous is because “Love and Hurry are not at all compatible ... because Love, always takes time, and time is the one thing that hurried people don’t have” (87).
- Illustration [Big Rocks/ Small Rocks](#) visual communicates the importance of priorities.

## Texts:

**Luke 10:38-42: Mary & Martha.** Martha is so busy that she misses out on what is most important. For those of us who struggle with busyness, our dilemma is bigger than a shortage of time. It’s a problem of priorities. We tend to let the urgent things crowd out the important things. Are we missing the main thing because we are busy with other good things?

The story of these two sisters teaches us that we must live counter-culturally in order to experience the life that Jesus wants us to live. We must learn how to say “no” to good things so we can say “yes” to the main thing. This text directly follows the parable of the Good Samaritan, and we see how this story calls us to take the first part of the Great Commandment seriously. In the midst of our crazy lives, we have to prioritize what Jesus says is most important: to love him with everything we have and to love our neighbors.

**Mark 5:21-43: Jairus’ daughter and the bleeding woman.** Jesus kept a pace of life in which he had time for interruptions. Can the same be said of us? This is just one of several examples found in the New Testament. Are we living at a pace that allows us to be interruptible?

**Luke 8:1-15: The Parable of The Sower.** The third soil didn’t produce because it was choked out by weeds. In the text, we learn that this soil is a picture of those who hear the Gospel message, but as they go on their way, the message is choked and dies because of life’s worries, riches, and pleasures.

**Psalms. 90:12:** “Teach me to number my days alright that we might gain a heart of wisdom.” A great secondary text on priorities.

**Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42-44, Luke 9:18, Luke 9:28, Luke 11:1, Luke 22:39** Throughout the New Testament we see that Jesus lives his life in a specific rhythm. He regularly withdraws and slows down in order to live at a healthy pace.



## Application

**Next Step Assignment:** Spend at least an hour in your front yard or common area this week and see what happens. You might also want to take a walk in your neighborhood. Introduce yourself to people when you see them or take the next step if you already know them. Look for a way to capture a story about someone who does this and share it the following Sunday.

**Prayer of the week:** God, give me the courage and desire to make time to take the next step with those who live closest to me.

**Week 2 Sermon Video:** <https://vimeo.com/101146448>

## Week 3: The Fear Factor



**Big Idea:** In order to take the Great Commandment seriously, we must be those who God has placed around us. It's not always going to be pretty, but it is going to be significant.



**Action Step:** Encourage everyone to host or simply be part of a neighborhood gathering within the next 3 months. Include the block map cards again and ask your people to commit to partnering with others in their neighborhood to throw a great party. Tell your people about the block party kit that is available on [www.artofneighboring.com](http://www.artofneighboring.com).

### Thoughts to Build on:

- Because our neighbors are always going to be there, getting involved in their lives can feel uncomfortable and challenging. We return from downtown or a global trip to our comfortable world; our neighbors, however, are always there.
- One of the side effects of the 24 hours news phenomenon is that it can cause us to be suspicious and fearful of those we don't know. When we turn on the TV and see and hear about all of the brokenness in our world, it shapes our world view and our view of others.
- "Good Fences make Good Neighbors." We have a tendency to desire safe and clean environments. When this is lived out, it leads us to isolation.
- Jesus has called us to engage in the messiness of relationships. Real relationships are always messy; think about your family relationships.
- Jesus often made religious people uncomfortable because of the people that he spent time with. When was the last time we were accused of being friends with sketchy people?
- This issue of neighboring will confront many things in our lives – how we spend our money and our time, how we view our things. It will cause us to confront many of our fears.

## Texts:

**Luke 7:36-37: Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman.** A number of neighboring principles arise from this text. Jesus makes the religious people uncomfortable because he is willing to receive a foot washing from this woman. Are we willing to be around people who live extremely differently than we do? Allowing others to serve you is something that creates depth in relationships.

Jesus says to Simon, “Do you see this woman?” Do have eyes to see what is really happening in our neighborhoods?

**Luke 5:27-32: The Calling of Levi.** Levi gathers his friends by throwing a party. Jesus comes to the party and is accused of hanging out with messy people. Close with this text and follow with a challenge to be a part of a block party.



## Application

**Next Step Assignment:** Ask everyone to host or be a part of neighborhood gathering sometime in the next 3 months. Allow them to record their commitment to do this. Set up a way to capture block party stories.

Encourage your people to partner with others on their block in order to gather their neighbors together (this is a big deal on a number of levels!)

Practical Idea: Throw a block party to kick off the summer or celebrate a Holiday (e.g., 4th of July, Labor Day, Memorial day, etc.).

**Prayer of the week:** God, would you give us eyes to see where you are already at work in our neighborhoods and in the lives of my neighbors?

**Week 3 Sermon Video:** <https://vimeo.com/101146450>